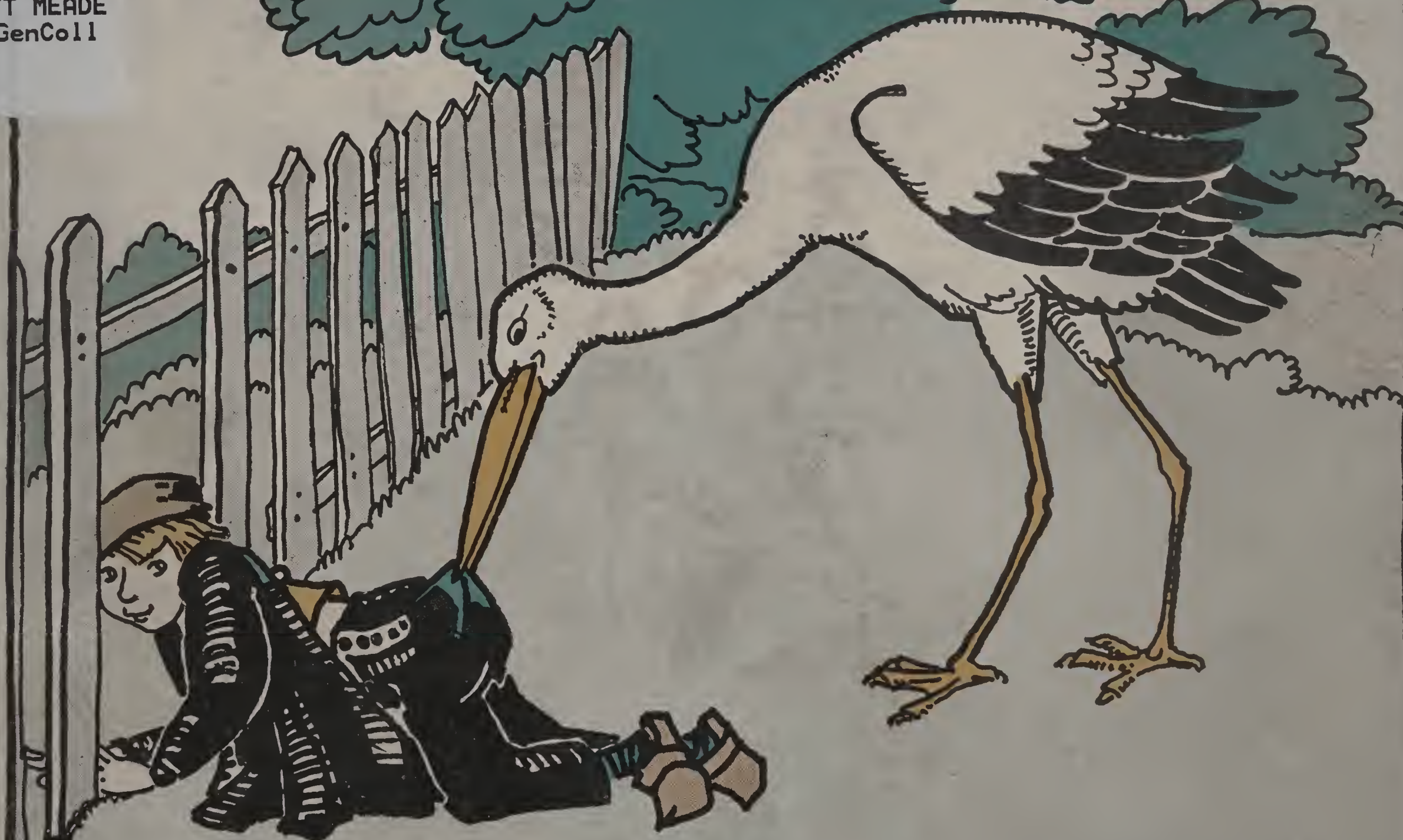


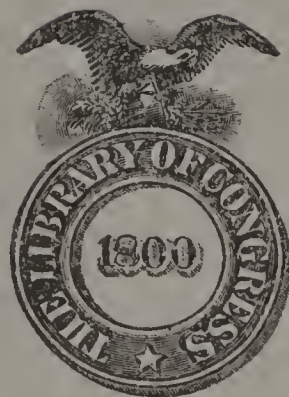
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HANSI THE STORK



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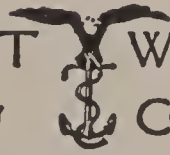
HANSI THE STORK

By

OSCAR LUDMANN

Illustrated by
EMMA L. BROCK



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Dedicated To
JEANNE CLARA LUDMANN

INTRODUCTION

Alsace-Lorraine, that fertile little country, imparts by its name alone the idea of political unrest, bitter fighting, and changes in nationality. Since the beginnings of history, the inhabitants of this borderland have struggled and suffered, while mightier neighbors looked on with envious eyes.

The nationality of Alsace-Lorraine has changed and changed again, but this has not been able to alter the spirit of the Alsatian people, nor the symbol of their country—the stork. On the slender steeples of medieval domes, on humble Protestant village churches, and on the glorious French cathedrals of worship, not only is there the cross of the Gallic cock, but surely there will be a wagon wheel on which the stork family has built its nest.

Motionless, standing on one leg, the gracious birds look down upon busy humanity. They know that Alsace-Lorraine is their country, and that no one will ever harm them. When the morning sun rises bright and warm above the hilltops, the stork clappers with his beak as if to awaken the sleepers. At night he glides in wide circles high, high up in the air, as if to watch over the community below.

When the long winter months are over, the stork will appear one day in his summer home, clapping lustily with

his beak. Excited villagers will rub their hands and exclaim joyously, "It won't be long any more—Spring is here!"

Throughout the whole warm season Father and Mother Stork will live up on the church tower and one morning there will be an especially early and noisy awakening. From underneath the black-tipped white wings of Mother Stork three or four hungry little red beaks will cry for food.

When the gay-colored leaves begin to fall in the cool autumn breeze, the whole stork family will stand motionless on the edge of the church roof, their long bills pointing southward. The air will tremble as thousands of the birds clapper together a "good-bye" and like great snowflakes take leave of Alsace-Lorraine to fly across the Mediterranean.

Time passes. The weather vane disappears from the roofs of Alsatian houses; the eagle has rotted away. But there will still remain the wagon wheel with the stork nest. Generations have gone by. Old feuds have been buried. Emblems of nations have changed over and over again.

But the real national symbol of Alsace-Lorraine is a living bird, the stork. And there is no worse disgrace to a true Alsatian than to belong to a community "where not even a stork wants to stay!"

* * *

OSCAR LUDMANN.



HANSI THE STORK

I

HANSI AND YERRI

YERRI tiptoed along the low stone wall. He got down on his knees and peeped through a knothole of the heavy oak gate, and smiled. There, on the granite border of the well stood Hansi the stork.

It was always refreshing and cool in the shadow of the huge chestnut tree, and Hansi was taking a nap.

One of his long legs was drawn up under his right wing and his beak was hidden in the soft feathers of his back.

“I’ll surprise him,” Yerri thought, and he chuckled to himself. “I’ll just keep my shoes in my hand and creep very quietly up to him. Then I’ll put this fat frog under his nose!”

But Yerri was too excited. He dropped one of his wooden shoes! Up went the stork and rushed toward the gate.

When he saw Yerri he was so happy that he clattered his beak together and made a loud noise like the sound of a drum. Then



he watched with his sharp brown eyes to see what Yerri would do.

“Here, Hansi, see what I brought you,” and Yerri took a frog out of the deep pocket of his black apron.

The stork cocked his head over to one side, first to the right and then to the left. He could very well judge what a big frog it was by the fat green legs kicking and struggling between Yerri’s fingers.

Then he drew his beak far back ready to catch it. But when Yerri opened his hand, that clumsy frog didn’t jump out. Instead, it sat still and began to croak loudly.



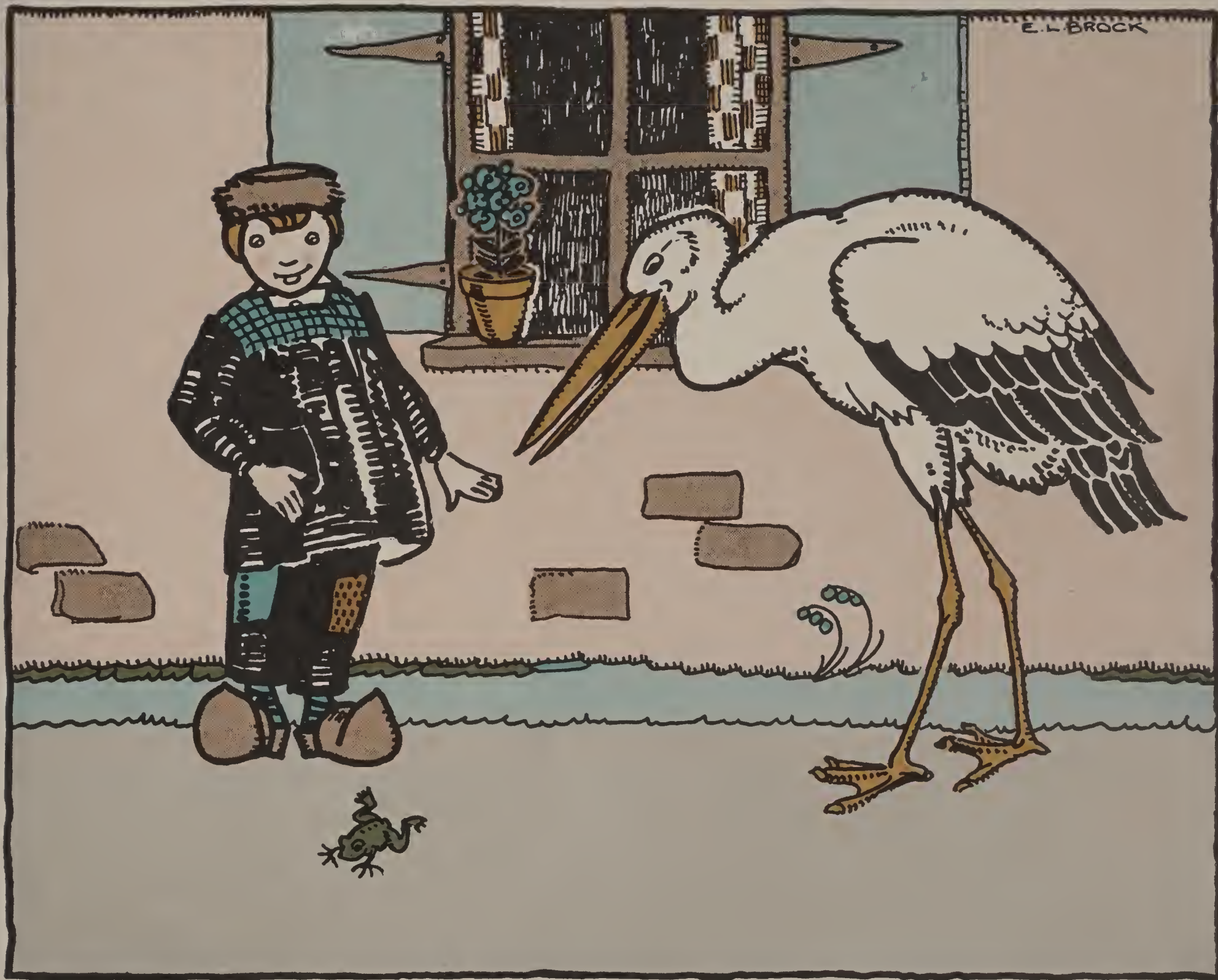
It was one of those arrogant, plump mud frogs that was very much pleased by its own singing. At last, Yerri had to give it a push and “Hop!” down it jumped.

Hansi was watching. He let the frog get quite a distance away, then he looked at Yerri as if to say, “All right; now we’re ready!”

Together they started to run. Just as Yerri put out his hand to catch it, Hansi struck forward with his long red beak, quick as a flash.

He swallowed hard, and the frog disappeared down his graceful, long, white neck.

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II

HOW GRANDFATHER FOUND HANSI

“Well, Yerri,” Grandfather called, smiling, from the window. “I see that Hansi has had his breakfast. Now come in and eat yours!”

Yerri ran up the three stone steps right into the big kitchen. His grandfather lifted him up and kissed him good morning.

At the sink he washed his hands under the ice cold water of the pump. “Plump!” grunted the pump when the handle went down, and “schll . . . schll!” when the water was sucked up.



Yerri always liked to be at that pump just underneath the narrow window. Through the red and white checkered curtains he could see the steep church tower and the stork nest on top.

Now, as he stood there, one of the big birds was sitting in the nest with her beak pointed up in the air. She was clapping a welcome to Father Stork.

He was flying down to her in circles, and looked like a white speck high, high up in the sky.

“Grandfather!” Yerri called, all excited. “Look! Why does not Hansi fly off some-



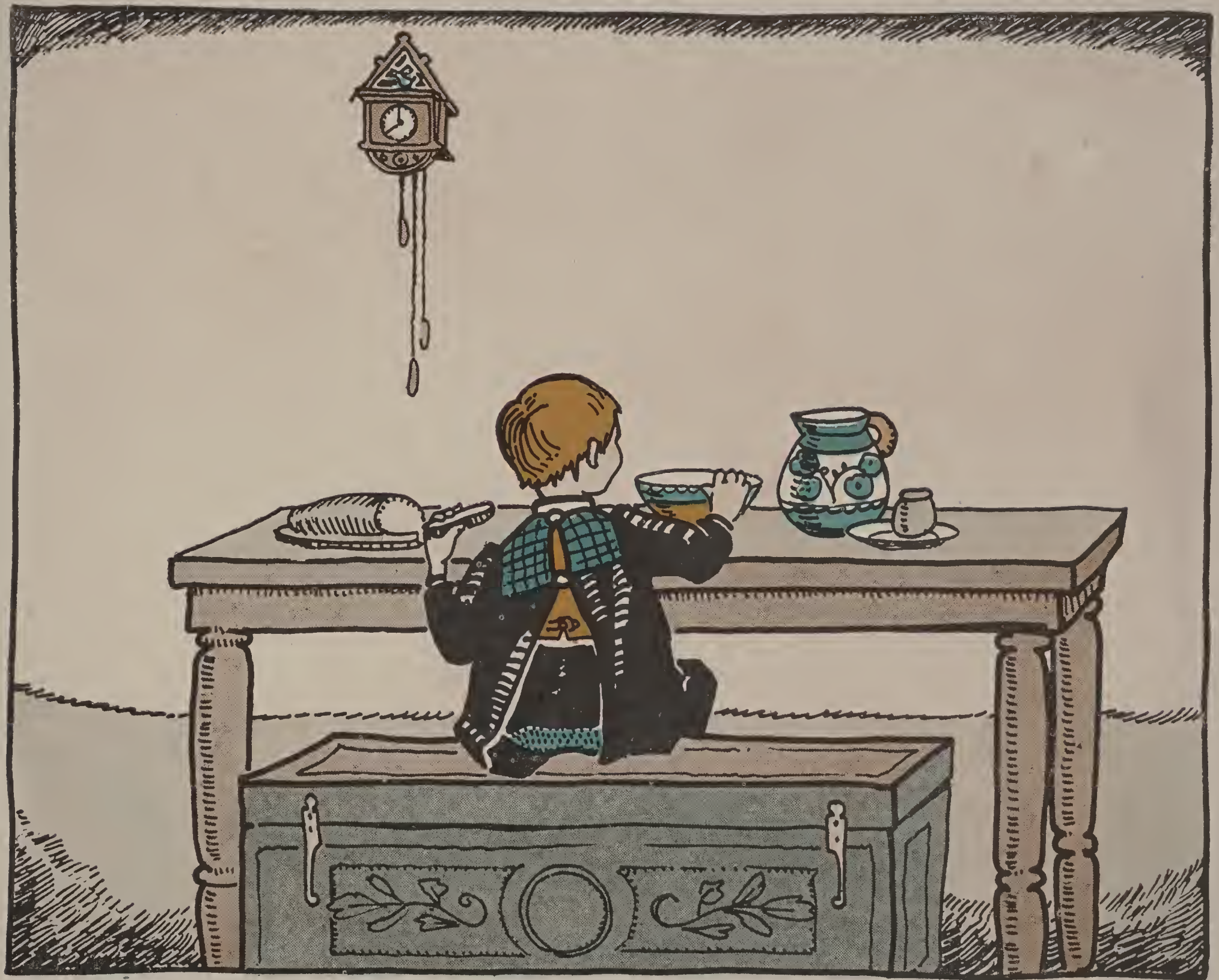
times? It must be wonderful to be so high up."

"I will tell you about Hansi, and why he doesn't fly," Grandfather answered.

He set Yerri on a high oak chest so that he could reach up to the table. Yerri drank his warm milk from a big hand-painted bowl, and ate his thick slice of bread spread with butter and honey.

The clock on the wall started to buzz, then a tiny wooden bird came out and peeped eight times, "Cuckoo-oo, cuckoo-oo!"

When it had gone back into its house on



top of the clock, Grandfather told Yerri the story.

“Two years ago this summer I stood under the church tower looking up at the Stork family. I saw Father Stork fly down with a long snake. Three hungry little storks opened their mouths, but the snake was very lively and slipped down the roof.

“Hansi crawled out of the nest and hopped after it, but when he came to the edge of the roof—there he slipped and fell down!

“Poor Hansi lay on the ground with a broken wing, never to fly again. So I



brought him home and he is surely thankful to me. He likes you, too, because you are good to him.”

Yerri finished his breakfast and carried the empty dishes to the sink. Then he went out of doors to find his playmate.





III

HANSI AS A WATCHDOG

The bell on the gate rang and Yerri ran to see who was there. But Hansi rushed ahead of him. A ragged-looking tramp had entered.

The stork stood in front of him and made a loud clapping noise with his beak, like the sound of a bass drum. He was very angry. His feathers bristled up and he walked closer to the tramp.

When the stranger lifted a knotty stick



ready to strike, Yerri was frightened himself.

“Out of my way!” the tramp growled, and down came his stick.

But Hansi was not afraid. He drew back his hard red beak, then he grabbed the tramp by the hand.

“OUCH!” the tramp cried.

But Hansi did not stop. Again and again he struck out, now at the arms, now at the legs, until the tramp turned and ran out through the gate.

Grandfather didn't need to keep a watchdog. Hansi would let no strangers in.



IV

HIDE AND GO SEEK

The trouble was quickly forgotten, and Hansi chased Yerri around the yard. After a while they were out of breath. Hansi rested on the wall of the well, and Yerri went outside the gate.

He peeked through the knothole, and Hansi cocked his head over to one side to look with his sharp eyes. But he did not move.

Then Yerri opened the gate a crack, and Hansi rushed to meet him. Instead of com-



ing in, Yerri let the gate slam shut and laughed.

“Try and find me!” he called out to Hansi.

He crawled along the stone wall and came to the wooden fence outside the garden. There was a board missing, and Yerri looked through.

He could see Hansi still waiting at the gate under the archway. Then he crept very quietly through the broken place in the fence.

But he was hardly inside when Hansi saw him and came rushing. Yerri tried to



get out again, but was not quick enough. Hansi held him by the seat of his trousers, and dragged him in with all his might.

He was surely strong, too, so Yerri was the loser. This is the way they played "hide-and-go-seek."

When the sun went down behind the hills, painting the steep roofs in gold and leaving the yard in a deep shadow, Yerri knew it was time to rest. The church-bell rang for prayer-time. Everybody in the village took off their caps and said a little prayer, so Yerri did too. The chickens went to their coops.



But the noisy geese did not want to go to sleep. Yerri picked up a stick to drive them to the barn. The stubborn gander hissed at Yerri and tried to bite his leg.

Then Hansi came to help. He picked feathers out of the gander's tail and made such a loud noise clapping his beak, that all the geese ran into the poultry barn.

Up on the church tower the two storks settled down to rest, and Hansi went to his favorite place at the well.

Yerri went to bed too, and huddled himself deep and warm in the feather bed, underneath the checkered covering.



V

THE FOUR NEW STORKS

One bright morning, Yerri woke up with a jump. Never before had he heard so much clapping from the storks up on the church tower. He ran to his window to see what was going on.

High up in the air the two big storks were flying in circles above their nest. They would dive down and then float in the air with outstretched wings, all the time drumming with their beaks.

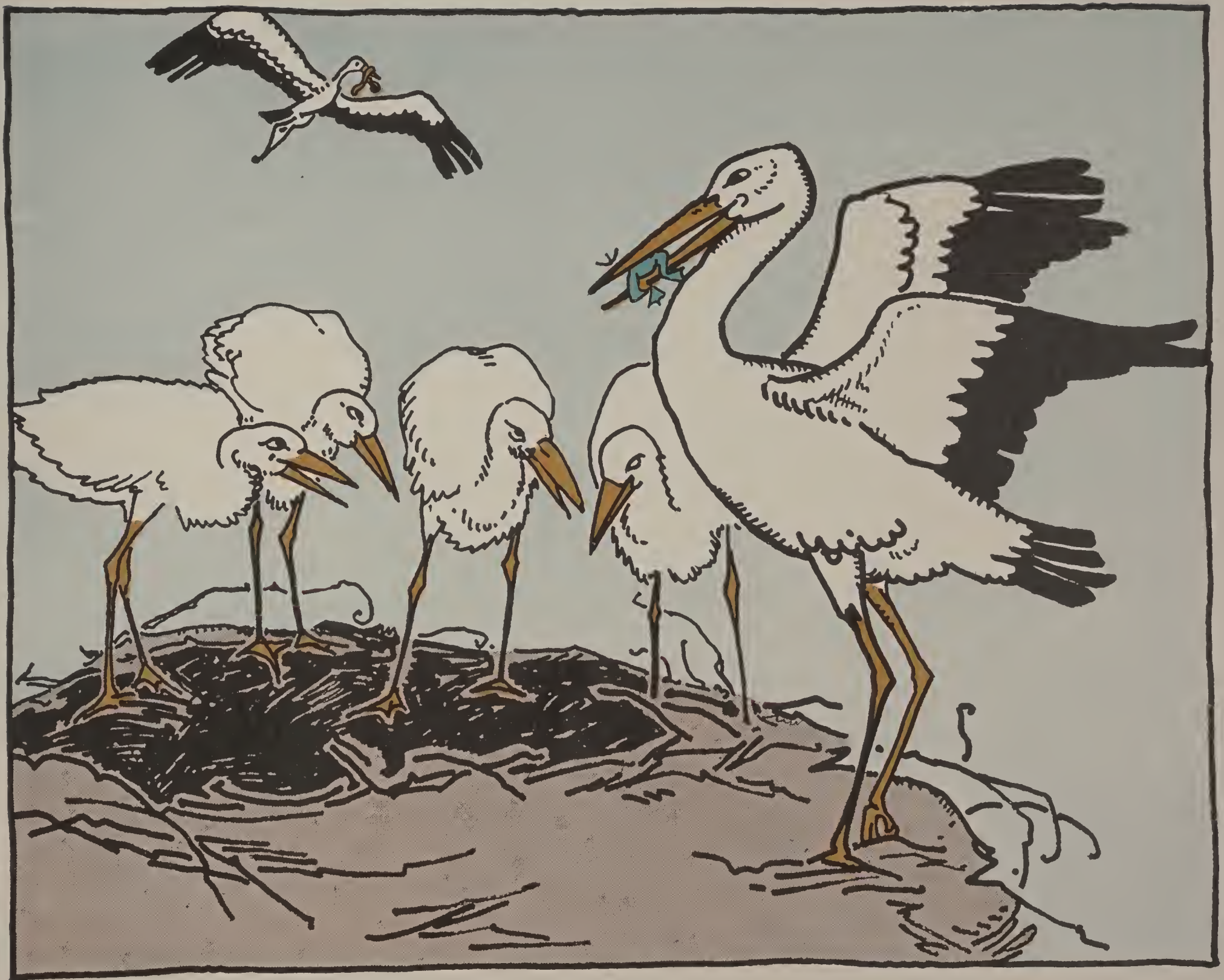
Yerri could see four wide-open, tiny red bills between the twigs of the nest. In the



yard Hansi rushed back and forth, also clapping with his beak to show how glad he was that a brood of young storks had arrived.

While Yerri and Hansi played under the chestnut tree at the well, the baby storks were growing up. When the fall wind rustled through the red and yellow leaves, and when the prickly burrs of the chestnuts broke open, the little storks were quite big.

Once in a while one crawled to the edge of the nest, drew up one leg like the old ones, and looked down into the village.



VI

THE LITTLE ONES LEARN TO FLY

At night, Father Stork and Mother Stork stood motionless on the roof beside the nest and watched over their young ones.

One morning, there were six beautiful storks lined up like soldiers on parade. First two of them flew up elegantly and the rest followed, fluttering awkwardly.

The young storks were flying out for the first time. Yerri could see which were the young ones because they did not pull their legs against their stomachs but kicked as if to catch a foothold somewhere.



Hansi grew more and more excited and once when a young stork rested on a branch of the chestnut tree, he ran up and down in front of it.

Then he pointed his beak far up in the air and drummed softly as if to invite the other to come down and play with him.

Hansi acted just as the storks do in springtime when they come to their old home and choose their mates. Hansi made such deep bows to the stork in the tree that his beak touched the ground.

But he begged in vain. The young stork flew back to the roof.



VII

THEIR MIGRATION TO AFRICA

When Hansi went at night to his resting place and Yerri went to bed, the cold October wind whistled over the roof and the weather vane squeaked. The storks stood motionless all night through, waiting for the sun to rise.

The young ones looked just like the old ones now, sharply outlined against the sky, their bills pointed southward.



One day, Yerri's grandfather took him by the hand.

"Come with me," he said. "I want you to see a wonderful sight."

Together they went over to the church. Up in the sky there were dark swarms of small birds flying south.

"Those birds are migrating, Yerri," Grandfather explained. "Winter is coming and the snow will cover the whole country. There won't be any flies or caterpillars, nor anything for them to eat. So they fly away to a warmer country."

"Do the storks go too?" Yerri asked.



“Oh, yes! That is why I am taking you up in the church tower. You will see them meet for the long trip across the Mediterranean.

“I wish Hansi could fly, too. He is always dreary when he is left alone in the winter. . . . Come, here we can climb up to the tower.”

Up the spiral stairway they went, higher and higher. They passed by the great wheels of the clock. Yerri peeked through a small, Gothic window.

“Look, Grandfather! How far I can see!”



“Come on,” Grandfather urged. “We must go higher and then you can look right into the stork’s nest—where Hansi was born. Give me your hand now.”

They climbed up a steep ladder. At last they stopped between the big church bell and the immense oak beams.

The wind whistled around them. Bats were hanging by their feet from the beams, and from one dark corner an owl stared at them with glaring eyes.

“Let’s go down again,” Yerri begged.

“Come, don’t be frightened. Look out here, but hold on tight.”



“I can see the wagon wheel with the nest on it,” Yerri said. “Who put the wheel there, Grandfather?”

“Every village wants a stork to make his nest there, Yerri. It is the sign of peace—the sign of our country.

“So they put the wheel up because it is easy for a stork to weave his nest through the spokes. No stork will ever go in a place where the people are not good to him.”

“Look, Grandfather!” Yerri interrupted. “Look at all those storks down in the swamp. Here comes another flock. See! Just over our heads, six are flying. They



are OUR storks! Where are they all going?"

"Straight south," Grandfather answered. "Thousands of them will meet in that swamp, then they will fly to meet other flocks from the valleys of the Rhine and from all over Alsace-Lorraine. Together they will cross the Mediterranean into Africa.

"Look out there now. Can you imagine how little our village looks in the eyes of a stork?"

"Yet, every year they come back and find their own nests. It would take us days on



a fast train to go that far; it would take a week on a steamboat!"

Like a cloud of snowflakes the white birds hovered over the swamp. There was a thundering noise when they all clattered with their beaks. They were saying, "Goodbye."

Down in the yard Hansi was running back and forth. He, too, fluttered a goodbye with his good wing, and clattered noisily with his beak. But he was very sad.

When the storks had flown southward, far out of sight, he climbed up on the wall of the well, drew up one leg and hid his



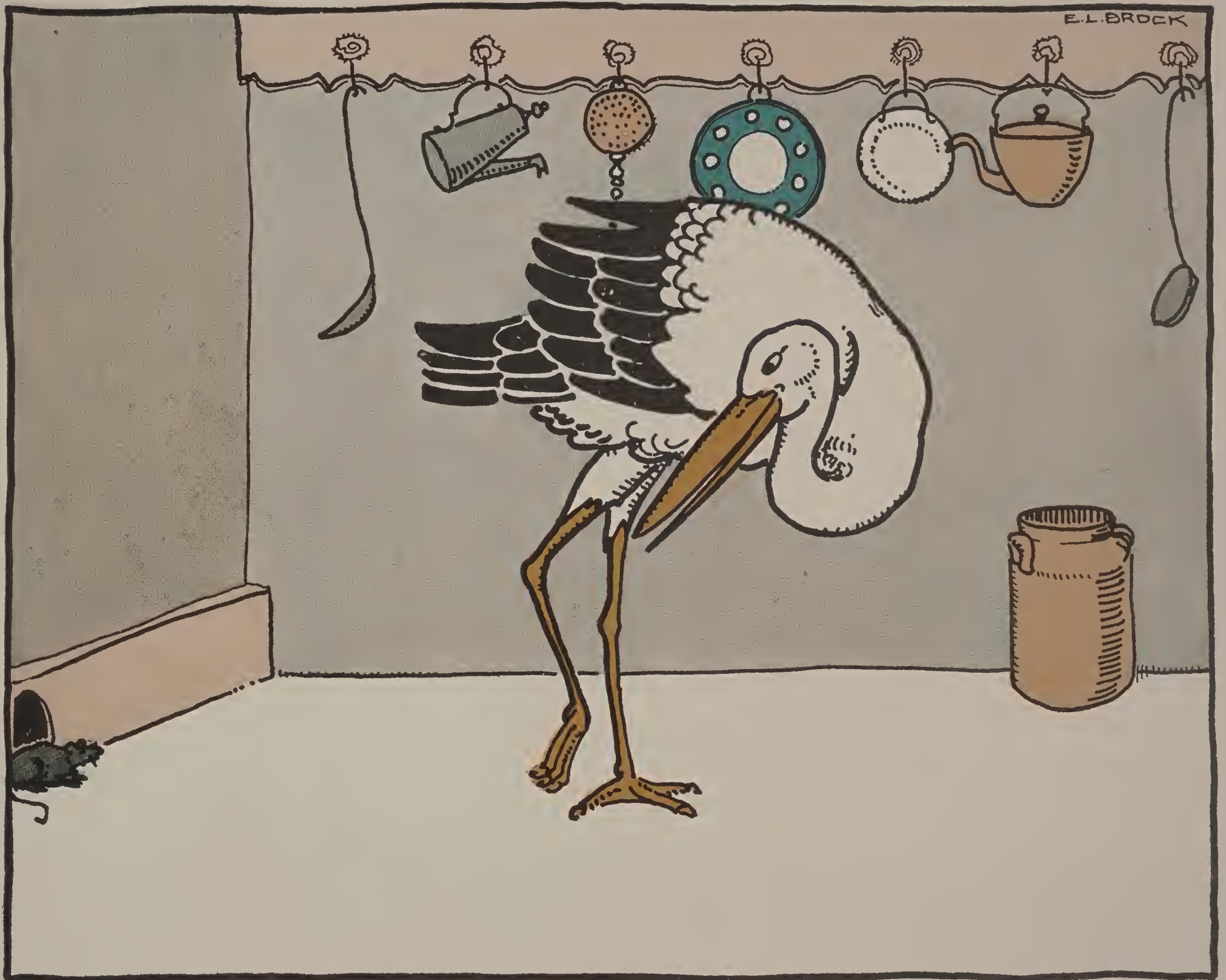
head under his wing. He did not want to play even with Yerri.

“It is hard for Hansi to stay here,” Grandfather said. “In the cold winter he stands behind the stove in our kitchen most of the time, I think he dreams about sunny Africa. Sometimes he goes outside and stalks through the deep snow, but not for long.

“When the mice come into the house and gnaw and scratch, he is on the watch. There is no crack or hole which Hansi does not discover.

“He will wait for hours until some tiny

E.L. BROCK



nose sniffs the air cautiously, then he strikes quickly and the mouse doesn't steal any more.

“When winter is over and the other storks come back, then you will catch frogs for Hansi again and he will be the same good friend and playmate.”





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